Life of a Creek

Numerous creeks, such as Taylor Run, crisscross Alexandria's landscape. Each creek is an important part of the ecology of the woodland through which it flows, providing habitat for small fish, amphibians and aquatic invertebrates. Creeks also provide reliable sources of drinking water for local wildlife. A creek's character is shaped by a variety of factors, including the local geology, changing weather patterns and human development.

How was this Landscape Formed?

Several million years ago, streams draining from Virginia's Appalachian Highlands spread a blanket of silt, sand and gravel over the area while constantly shifting their courses across the landscape. Overtime, as the Piedmont Plateau and the Appalachian Highlands were uplifted, the slope of the land increased, causing streams to downcut through the earlier sediments and deepen their valleys. This creek and the surrounding valley are the result of these geologic processes.

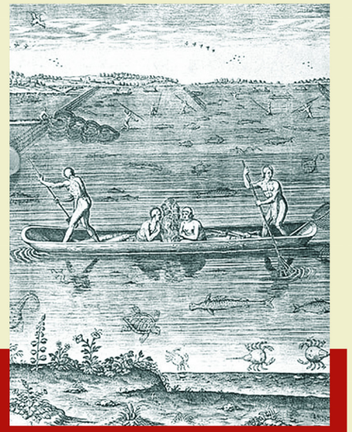
Wildlife in Taylor Run

Blacknosed Dace

Redbacked Salamander

Upland Chorus Frog

Illustrations by Alexandra Garcia



This late seventeenth century engraving by Theodor De Bry depicts North Carolina Algonkians fishing in canoes, which Virginia Algonkians also used. The fire built up on a hearth in the canoe was used to lure fish at night for spearing.

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Prehistoric Times

About 12,000 years ago, Native Americans began using natural resources along creeks, streams and rivers. Naturally occurring springs once provided sources of clean drinking water. Prehistoric people also used the abundance of plants and animals, which were seasonally available along these waterways, for food and shelter. Small fish, crayfish and amphibians were obtained from creeks and streams; large fish were trapped and speared in rivers. When Europeans arrived in Virginia four hundred years ago, Algonkians were making dugout canoes from poplar trees and building fish weirs (reed or twig fence enclosures) in river shallows to collect large fish, such as sturgeon.

The Twentieth Century

Before water was piped into local homes in the first part of the twentieth century, residents viewed the nearby spring as essential for daily living. Elizabeth Douglas, a long-time resident of the Chinquapin area recalled:

"[We] got up at quarter to five. Everybody had chores to do. . .We had to go cross the road, down the hill to the spring."

Before pipes brought water into Old Town homes; children walked to street corners to pump water. In the Chinquapin area, children went to the spring to get water for their families.

Alexandria Library, Special Collections

The Twenty-First Century

Human development of the surrounding uplands has greatly altered this creek. Rainwater surges into Taylor Run from asphalt roads, parking lots and other artificial surfaces. This increased water runoff results in greatly accelerated erosion, additional pollutants entering the creek and loss of the natural habitat. The creek also widens, exposing more surface area to evaporation and reducing the viability of the habitat. Fewer species live in Taylor Run today than in the past.

Water has always been valued. Water conservation was advocated in this Work Projects Administration (WPA) War Services Project (1941-1943) poster.

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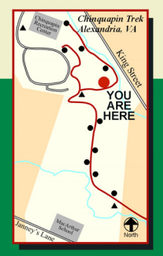

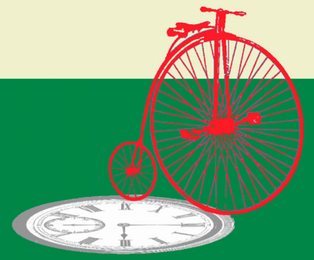

Alexandria Heritage Trail

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